IS THE ANGEL STILL IN THE HOUSE? :

CHANGES IN FEMALE IDEALS IN NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH- CENTURY LITERATURE

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Abstract

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The following paper is an analysis of the ways in which Coventry Patmore's image of female perfection, the Angel in the House, and the ideals which it embodies have affected literary works by nineteenth- and twentieth-century female authors. I used selected literary works from Louisa May Alcott and Virginia Woolf to represent the overall societal beliefs of the authors' time periods. By viewing the changes in the authors' attitudes toward the image and the strength with which society enforced Angelic female ideals, one can see the changes in the societal expectations for female behavior and, therefore, the changes in women's freedom and equality. I discuss women's struggle to overcome the Angel image, which assumes that all women should submissively devote themselves to the institutions of domesticity, marriage, and motherhood. I also explored the question of whether or not we have any cultural or literary image that would embody the current beliefs about the ideal characteristics of womanhood. I found that women of the 1990s must still face ideals which, although they vary from the Angelic characteristics listed in Patmore's poem, shape women's self-perceptions. Therefore, in the past two centuries, the Angel image has affected women's lives as well as their literary works.

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Chapter 1

Origin of the Image:
The Angel Gets Its Wings

Imagine June Cleaver from the 1950's television sitcom "Leave It to Beaver," wearing her neatly-ironed apron, smiling with glee as she vacuums the carpet and awaits the arrival of the head of the household--her husband. The image of the ideal, submissive housewife is not a new concept. By simply changing the vacuum into the materials used in needlepoint and removing Mrs. Cleaver's apron, a person may transform the image into that of the ideal nineteenth-century wife, a quiet woman in the drawing room. These images are familiar to most people because various media, such as literature and television, have often portrayed women who happily stay in their "proper" place within the hierarchy of power. Therefore, it was not shocking when, in 1854, Coventry Patmore published his famous love poem, "The Angel in the House," which advocated a submissive status for women. Within this poem, the narrator describes the courtship of his bride and his ideas about the responsibilities of women in love and marriage. He portrays his lover as the perfect woman--beautiful, chaste, uneducated, loyal, and submissive. Many of the instructional books of Patmore's time period provide evidence of the ways in which the importance of these virtues was stressed to Victorian women, both in England and in America. In her account of the history of women in Victorian America, Ellen Plante describes the instructional books which suggested that women should obtain "good manners . . . the art of conversation, benevolence, self control" because these virtues would transform the women into "a good and fitting wife and the ideal mother. In short, she would be well suited to fulfill her predetermined role . . ." (4). Although these ideals were already widely established in nineteenth-century society, Patmore's poem achieved literary significance by giving these characteristics a collective term--"Angel in the House." As the term's name suggests, it is often used to refer to the idea of the chaste, *angelic* figure and her role in the "woman's sphere" of domesticity and *home*life. Although Patmore meant to promote the virtue of submission and show its worth, a modern

reading of the poem reveals the flawed reasoning which Patmore uses to justify his anti-feminist beliefs. He asserts that God established a hierarchy of power between the sexes, and women occupy a submissive status within the hierarchy; therefore, women's primary life goal should be to serve their husbands, and this duty should also form the women's self-identity. However, Patmore weakens his arguments by also discussing the ways in which the hierarchy (a supposedly "inevitable" order) required constant supervision and fear tactics to ensure that women did not attempt to gain power and, thereby, change the order.

Patmore uses the Bible to interpret the word of God and, thereby, to create a seemingly indisputable basis for his argument. He claims that God established a "Sweet Order" of separate spheres for men and women (175). This order, although important in youth, takes on a new significance within a marriage. Marriage provides the only point where the circles are allowed to intersect boundaries with one another. Patmore compares this intersection to "'coupled suns, that, from afar, / 'Mingle their mutual spheres, while each / 'Circles the twin obsequious star . . ." (127). The narrator uses the term "obsequious" to show that the stars are placed in separate positions and must submit to this order because it is created by an all-powerful God; similarly, men and women are placed by God in unalterable and separate spheres. Therefore, a distinct order is created which states that humans are controlled by worldly forces which, in turn, are controlled by God. Women must accept this "proper" order and help prevent the chaos that would result from any deviation. Husbands can easily accept this role because its power structure benefits them, but wives must face difficult task of submitting to God's decision that in life women's status remains lower than the status of their husbands. Patmore, however, does not acknowledge the difficulty of accepting submission. The narrator uses the heavenly imagery of suns, stars, and "Angels" to imply that women appear saintly and, as such, will give wholly of

themselves to serve God. Therefore, according to God's wishes, they will never question their submissive status. Patmore describes this presumably inevitable order:

> And prizing what she can't prevent,
>
> (Right wisdom, often misdeem'd whim,)
>
> Her will's indomitably bent
>
> On mere submissiveness to him . . . (149)

This passage uses the very important term "submissiveness," which is often used in literary texts to explain women's place in the hierarchy of power. For instance, Barbara Welter, in "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," uses submission to help explain the concept of the "True Woman," an image which is almost identical to Patmore's "Angel." She states that during the middle of the nineteenth-century "Submission was perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women" (158). Their submissive status implied that women's only aspiration in life should be to act as mere servants to their husbands' demands and needs. The narrator of "Angel in the House" describes his lover's devotion by saying, "'what at all times I admire / 'Is, not that she is wise or good, / 'But just the thing which I desire" (Patmore 183). But, according to the narrator, a woman does not merely accept her slave status; "she flings herself" into her work with excitement (Patmore 111). But, the intense need to please their husbands has negative side effects on women's minds. Under the rule of English common law, a woman "had no independent legal standing. She could neither own property nor sign contracts . . . Her legal existence merged into that of her husband" (Evans 22). This lack of self-identity and abundance of male-defined gender roles left many women with a limited sense of importance. Therefore, a woman was forced to obtain her self-identity and self-confidence through her husband and his opinion of her efforts to please him:

She loves him for his love of her.

How happy 'tis he seems to see

In her that utter loveliness

Which she, for his sake, longs to be! (Patmore 148)

However, this self-identity is misleading because, as Gilbert and Gubar explain, Patmore's lover's best attribute "is that her virtue makes her *man* 'great.' In and of herself, she is neither great nor extraordinary" (22). In other words, she enhances the self-confidence of the man, but, by forming her self-identity through her husband, she has become more dependent upon him. Therefore, the wife's self-identity, which should theoretically provide her with autonomy, actually makes her more subservient because her efforts to live vicariously through her husband cause her to place him in a position of idolatry, to feel unworthy of his love, and to decrease her self-confidence. Thus, Patmore presents and undermines the argument that women inevitably must occupy subordinate positions within the hierarchy. He demonstrates that there are many other psychological and social restraints which are placed upon women in order to ensure that they remain subservient.

Patmore's idea of spheres, although it is supposedly inevitable, requires men constantly to create ways to maintain its balance. This maintenance is necessary to prevent the chaos and destruction which would result if women deviated from the order and attempted to gain power. Specifically, the narrator focuses on the importance of women being uneducated and chaste, realizing that a lack of these virtues would give women freedom of thought, action, and sexuality; therefore, the hierarchy of power would be destroyed.

The narrator repeatedly points out that women should know appropriately feminine things, but they should never become truly educated. A woman should remain "'wise in all she ought to

know, / 'How ignorant of all beside!'" (Patmore 147). If women obtained an education, the hierarchy of power would be placed in jeopardy. Men hold the more powerful position because of God's wishes, but education is needed to keep that power on a day-to-day basis. The need to purposefully prevent the equal education of women contradicts Patmore's idea that the men's and women's spheres are inherently unalterable. It is this potential for alteration in the power structure that motivates men to maintain it and, thereby, to ensure the security of their superior status. The more uneducated women remain, the smaller the probability is that they will take away men's jobs, or political positions, or question their orders and authority. Theoretically, women should admire their husbands for the intelligence that they, as women, cannot obtain. The narrator states, "And all the wisdom that she has / Is to love him for being wise" (180). In other words, the woman does not need an education because her husband has one, and the woman, being naturally more ignorant than the man, should admire her husband for letting her benefit from his education as he protects and guides her through life. The view that women were biologically proven to be more ignorant than men was common in the nineteenth-century. Barbara Welter quotes one nineteenth-century doctor who said that "Woman . . . has a head almost too small for intellect but just big enough for love" (159-160). Similar views are often expressed in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary works where symbolism is used to associate the woman with the heart or the emotional side of human nature and to associate men with the head or the intellectual side of human nature. Using similar imagery, Patmore associates his mistress with the emotional side of human nature as he worries about the effects that a trip to London will have upon his lover:

> She, mixing with the people there,
>
> Might come back alter'd, having caught

The foolish, fashionable air

Of knowing all, and feeling nought. (115)

Patmore is afraid that by being exposed to new ideas and cultures his lover will lose her feminine virtue of "feeling," so he advocates that women remain ignorant of worldly things. He argues that these things would cause women to lose their innocence of mind and would next lead to the loss of their physical innocence or chastity.

Although Welter asserts that "The fear of 'blue stockings' (the eighteenth-century male's term of derision for educated or literary women) need not persist . . .," Patmore portrays intelligent women as scheming, manipulative, and seductive creatures (Welter 167). Patmore promotes this view, knowing that the fear tactics will motivate men to work to keep women in their "proper" submissive positions. In a truly inevitable order, however, this reversal in power positions would not be possible; therefore, Patmore once again disproves his own argument. Throughout the poem, the narrator explains that it is man's nature and his weakness to be swayed by beauty and sex, but women should not use this weakness against men to gain power or to manipulate them. For instance, he condemns prostitutes for putting a price on sex while "Knowing man cannot chose but pay . . ." (79). But, perhaps the most striking example of Patmore's fear of scheming women can be seen in his description of a husband who was tricked into marrying a manipulative woman:

She joins the cunning of the snake,

To rivet and exalt his love;

Her mode of candour is deceit;

And what she thinks from what she'll say,

(And though I'll never call her cheat,)

Lies far as Scotland from Cathay.

Without his knowledge he was won,

Against his nature kept devout;

She'll never tell him how 'twas done,

And he will never find it out.

If, sudden, he suspects her wiles,

And hears her forging chain and trap,

And looks, she sits in simple smiles,

Her two hands lying in her lap. (181)

In this passage, Patmore describes the destructive power of women and the ways in which they may use their intelligence to deceive men. Therefore, he implies that if men do not work to maintain the hierarchy, then women will gain power and all men will become victims. This complete reversal of gender roles would not be possible if the order was inevitable and unalterable as Patmore asserts.

Patmore's poem both asserts and unconsciously disproves the necessity of separate spheres for men and women. But, by describing the idealistic virtues of nineteenth-century women which were all embodied within his lover, Patmore created a collective term for these ideals which would affect the writing of his contemporaries as well as future authors. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Angel in the House image has been both positively and negatively used in a variety of literary works. Many authors, male and female, have written books and essays praising Patmore's ideals. But, as the women's rights movement and feminism gained momentum in the late nineteenth century, the image was often used sarcastically in literature, such as the essays of Virginia Woolf which will be discussed in chapter three, and was held as the very

emblem of oppressive male ideals that feminists wished to change. They refused to accept Patmore's ideas that women should follow God's "Sweet Order" of separate spheres for men and women and men's undisputed authority in public and private life (175). In addition, as Darwinism became widely discussed in the nineteenth century, many interpretations of the Bible began to be questioned, including this idea of a patriarchy deemed proper by the will of God. But, regardless of the authors' positions for or against Patmore's image, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century writings show its influence, especially the works of women authors who remained haunted with the Angel's image and the societal expectations it placed on women's behavior in both their private and their public lives. A chronological study of the Angel image, such as this report will provide, shows the ways in which an author's acceptance or rejection of the image reflects the societal beliefs and historical events of the time periods in which the individual works were written. Therefore, the history of the Angel image provides a history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminist efforts and shows how women's gender roles have changed as women fought to change themselves from Angels into individuals.

Chapter 2

Little Women:
The Private, Domestic Angel

In 1868, fourteen years after the publication of Patmore's "The Angel in the House," Louisa May Alcott published her famous children's book, Little Women. At first glance, Alcott's novel seems to promote many of the same feminine virtues that Patmore idealized in his poem. In this respect, she followed the standard conventions of the popular nineteenth-century genre of ladies' journals and instructional books. As Gilbert and Gubar explain, "from the eighteenth century on, conduct books for ladies had proliferated . . . reminding all women that they should be angelic" (23). These books were "designed to bridge the gap between the schoolroom and the drawing room, to recommend docility, marriage, and obedience rather than autonomy or adventure" (Showalter 50). But, despite its clichéd marriage ending, Little Women breaks with the usual messages of instructional books and instead contains characters such as Jo, who searches for her independence and loves her dramatic exploits with her male friend, Laurie. Alcott's novel seems to support the idealized feminine virtues because Alcott knew that their endorsement was necessary to produce a successful, money-making children's book; however, the characters' searches for self-identities and the feminist speeches about gender roles and status which interrupt the narrative suggest that Alcott could not completely suppress her reservations regarding the societal expectation that little girls should mature into Angels (Foster and Simons 101). In Little Women, Louisa May Alcott reluctantly supports the Victorian ideals of domesticity, marriage, and motherhood, but she also warns girls not to allow these roles to form their entire self-identity and, to strengthen her argument, relates the stories of two very different girls, Beth and Jo, as they struggle to meet these ideals and to become good "little women."

As a young girl, Louisa faced a harsh socialization process initiated by her father, Bronson Alcott. Bronson tried to force Louisa into roles and behaviors which were deemed properly feminine by societal standards, but Louisa simply wanted to be herself--tomboyish and

independent. Louisa's father did not approve of her so-called manly attributes and "found her too aggressive, willful, and fierce for his definition of feminine" (Saxton 7). These personality attributes are very similar to Jo's boyish characteristics, and most critics agree that the struggles Jo faces as she becomes a woman are partially based on Alcott's life (Showalter 59). This difficult struggle with her father helped Alcott understand that women are not born feminine; instead, they must undergo gender socialization to learn the behaviors and attributes which society considers "feminine" and to be able to act accordingly (Foster and Simons 87). This contradicts Patmore's assertions that women's roles are defined by God because it is society, not God, which creates and perpetuates female roles (Patmore 175). The characters in Little Women all react differently to the socialization process, but they share the common difficulty of not being as saintly as the characters in most other moral books.

Alcott gives the book realism by creating characters who must struggle with real-life problems and with their own personal shortcomings (Foster and Simons 89). By doing so, she shows that girls are not Angels on moralistic pedestals but real people with tempers and faults who must overcome their natural tendencies and must train themselves to be more feminine. Beth, who is portrayed throughout the novel as a perfect Angel, is removed from her pedestal for a moment as Alcott mentions that Beth, like her sisters, suffers from small selfish thoughts: "not being an angel, but a very human little girl, she often 'wept a little weep,' . . . because she couldn't take music lessons and have a fine piano" (Alcott 39). In regards to the standards of femininity, Jo has the most serious flaws of any of the March sisters, but perhaps that is what makes her the most endearing and life-like character in the novel. Alcott expresses her obvious sympathy for Jo's difficulties by writing, "But you see Jo wasn't a heroine; she was only a struggling human girl, like hundreds of others, and she just acted out her nature, being sad, cross,

listless or energetic, as the mood suggested" (Alcott 435). The language of this quotation is very important because it tells the reader that Jo is "like hundreds of others" or an embodiment of every woman. Additionally, Alcott excuses Jo for following her emotional "nature." On the one hand, the fact that Jo "just acted out her nature" suggests that women inherently represent the emotional side of human nature (an argument also expressed by Patmore); on the other hand, the word "nature" suggests that suppressing these reactions, thereby acting more properly feminine, would be unnatural and wrong. Alcott often uses these subtle contradictions to make the reader question whether the rules of gender relations are based on human nature or societal construct and to ask whether they are right or wrong. Regardless of the subtle questions which Alcott invokes, Jo remains an obvious tomboy, a trait which simultaneously makes her proud and causes her grief. Jo often regrets that society expects her to mature into a proper lady instead of allowing her to have the fun that she associates with boys: "'I hate to think I've got to grow up and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look prim as a Chinaster. It's bad enough to be a girl, any-way, when I like boy's games, and work, and manners. I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy . . . I can only stay at home and knit like a poky old woman' . . ." (Alcott 3). Despite Jo's disdain for the societal standards of womanliness and the boring lifestyle to which they lead, she cannot isolate herself from society and maintain her boyish behavior. She must hide her true nature at social functions and attempt to fit in with the other girls, but her limited successes in these attempts cause her discomfort and grief. For instance, while attending Mrs. Gardiner's New Year's Eve party, Jo "felt as much out of place as a colt in a flower-garden" (Alcott 26). Throughout the novel, Jo is reminded by her mother and her sisters that she must gain self-control over her temper and her boyish impulses if she wishes to be viewed favorably by marriage candidates and society in general. Alcott demonstrates this principle by

forcing Jo to pay heavily for her losses of self-control. Critics of Alcott's works cite these moral lessons as examples of the clear anti-feminist sentiment which existed within the feminine ideals. For example, Foster and Simons comment that Jo's "longings to chat with boys and men as equals carry dangerous overtones of sexual freedom . . ."; in other words, Jo's relaxed demeanor during her conversations with boys implies that she does not meet the Angelic ideal of chastity (94). Similarly, Patricia Meyer Spacks comments that because Jo's blunt answers to her aunt's questions about the merits of foreign travel convince her aunt to choose Amy instead of Jo as her traveling companion on a European vacation, Jo should learn the lesson "that one should be careful about saying what she thinks" (98). These deviations from the feminine ideals are punished because, as Patmore also argued, the loss of chastity and the lack of submission threaten the hierarchy of gender relations and power structure. To avoid similar, and perhaps higher, consequences in the future, Jo must learn to control her natural instincts and force herself to be more docile and domestic. For encouragement, she idolizes the sweetness and simplicity of Beth's domestic life.

The virtue of domesticity is described as the most important skill that a young woman can learn because it is necessary in order to achieve a successful marriage and motherhood, the two central life goals of all ideal Victorian women. The March girls learn the importance of domesticity through the comments of their parents. Mrs. March tells Jo that "'cooking'" is "'a useful accomplishment, which no woman should be without' . . ." (Alcott 117). Similarly, Mr. March says, "'I value the womanly skill which keeps home happy, more than white hands or fashionable accomplishments . . .'" (Alcott 222). Since the novel is a children's book, it must have a instructional message. At the end of Part I, Alcott indirectly states the book's purpose by referring to Little Women as a "domestic drama" (Alcott 235). Alcott uses the character of Beth

to show domesticity and the Angel ideal as admirable standards, but she also explains that their unrealistic expectations can have harmful consequences on the lives of women. In short, Alcott asserts that women should learn the useful traits of cooking and housework, but the ideal of domesticity should not constitute women's life's meaning or form their self-identities. To prove this point, Beth is repeatedly referred to as "angelic" and portrayed as Patmore's ideal, but she suffers immensely because of her perfection. The narrator describes Beth as the ideal woman by stating that she was "always hopeful, happy, and serene, busy with the quiet duties she loved, every one's friend, and an angel in the house, long before those who loved her most had learned to know it" (Alcott 238). This description shows Beth as the docile, uncomplaining Angel who enjoys the "duties" of home, but she also seems tragic because she is friendly and well-liked yet no one truly knows her as a person or truly appreciates her worth. Her submissive status forces her to remain invisible to those around her, including her family and friends, until her death. Saxton describes this invisibility by commenting that Beth "fades away behind other people's needs and desires until . . . she disappears forever" (5). Beth lives to please others (as Patmore suggested is appropriate for Angels), but by doing so, she allows the ideal of domesticity to form her self-identity. She describes this problem to Jo by saying, "'I'm not like the rest of you; I never made any plans about what I'd do when I grew up; I never thought of being married, as you all did. I couldn't seem to imagine myself anything but stupid little Beth, trotting about at home, of no use anywhere but there'" (Alcott 374-375). In other words, Beth never formed a sense of herself as a person, so it comes as no surprise that others did not truly know her because she did not know herself. Beth gives this speech to Jo after she learns that Beth is going to die. It shows the reader that a purely domestic life, filled with no other dreams or sources for self-identity, is not fulfilling

and will lead to feelings of uselessness and disappointment when a woman reflects on her life's accomplishments.

Beth is repeatedly associated with angel imagery throughout the novel and then ends her uneventful life through a tragic death, but this course of events is not an accident: Alcott uses Beth's fate to warn other girls about the consequences of obtaining the Angel ideal. The aim of domesticity is Angelic, but if it is achieved, a woman becomes too close to perfection and too good for the mortal world, so she must leave this world and become a real angel through death (Welter 162). As Beth grows closer to death, the reader becomes conscious of her transformation into a real angel. The narrator describes Beth's gradual change by stating that her face looked "as if the mortal was being slowly refined away, and the immortal shining through the frail flesh with an indescribably pathetic beauty" (Alcott 371). This imagery suggests that the Angel inside of Beth is removing its inferior, earthly skin to become a more heavenly being.

Although Beth has limited effects upon the lives of her family during her life, her death changes the March's household forever. This traumatic event also marks the tuning point in Jo's boyish behavior. Abruptly, Jo changes her attitudes about housework and marriage as she inherits Beth's domestic qualities. In Jo's poem, "My Beth," she asks Beth for these domestic traits by writing:

> Leave me, as a gift, those virtues
> Which have beautified your life.
> Dear, bequeath me that great patience
> Which has power to sustain
> A cheerful, uncomplaining spirit
> In its prison-house of pain. (Alcott 417)

Jo admires Beth's "uncomplaining spirit" which is so immense that Beth does not grumble about the pain of her disease or the burden of her housework, but instead she remains submissive and quiet even during her death. It is also interesting to note that Beth's "pain," like her physical body and emotional spirit, is trapped or "*im*prisoned" within a "house," once again associating Beth with the image of the Angel in the House. In this poem, Jo asks for "patience" because she knows that it will be a difficult task to gain the self-control which, as previously-mentioned, will be necessary to achieve the Angelic ideals of domesticity and marriage and to obtain societal approval. The narrator describes Jo's difficulty in accepting her new domestic life by stating that Jo "fell into the moody, miserable state of mind which often comes when strong wills have to yield to the inevitable" (Alcott 433). The narrator, like most of Victorian society, assumes that a woman's transformation into a domestic being is "inevitable"; therefore, the narrator argues, Jo should not and cannot fight against her only place in society--that of a housewife. After Beth's death, Jo undergoes a brief, almost momentary, struggle which completely changes her attitude towards housework and makes her feel that "Brooms and dishcloths never could be as distasteful as they once had been, for Beth had presided over both; and something of her housewifely spirit seemed to linger round the little mop. . ." (Alcott 434). This "housewifely spirit," a term often used to describe Beth, seems to escape Beth's earthly body and transfer its residence into Jo's unsuspecting person. As recent critics have noted, many readers are unhappy with Jo's decision to abandon the feminist values which she so vehemently advocated throughout the beginning of the novel (MacDonald 24). Despite Mrs. March's comment that housework "'gives us [women] a sense of power and independence better than money or fashion,'" the reader is left with a feeling of disappointment because Jo abandons her independence and does not pursue her dreams of becoming a famous writer (Alcott 118). Jo does not choose to utilize her talents, but instead opts

for an Angelic life of domesticity, marriage, and motherhood. But, before Jo changes her boyish attitude, she asserts opinions about independence and marriage which make the reader question the merits of submitting to the Angel ideal.

Alcott is reluctant in her support for the ideals of domesticity and marriage because she knows that, although they are deemed necessary by Victorian society, these ideals deter the independence of women. Foster and Simons comment that "the book maintains a precarious balancing act, simultaneously providing for its readers a positive image of home and female domesticity *and* arguing for the importance of creative independence for women" (87). In general, Little Women supports the notion that girls should be allowed independence of mind to form their self-identity, but they should not be allowed independence of body (loss of chastity) or independence of physical location (lack of domesticity). Jo expresses the societal demands on women's physical locations by telling Laurie, "'If I was a boy, we'd run away together, and have a capital time; but as I'm a miserable girl, I must be proper, and stop at home'" (Alcott 213). The private, domestic sphere was considered to be women's proper place in Victorian society. If women deviated from this order and attempted to enter the public sphere, women often were viewed as insubordinate and, the patriarchal society would argue, should be stopped. In the novel, Alcott attempts to show the ways in which the independence of the mind shapes women's senses of self-identity and self-worth, but as the March girls mature, Alcott carefully dampens their dreams of independent, public lives and returns them to socially-acceptable adulthoods filled with domesticity, marriage, and motherhood. This argument about women's proper place in society was an important political and social issue during Alcott's time because, as Foster and Simons explain, "the Victorian intellectual dilemma of 'the woman question'" discussed "whether women were capable of functioning independently, equal to and competing with men, or whether

their strengths were something other, a natural complement to masculine qualities" (101). Throughout the novel, Jo clearly voices her opinions on the need for women's independence. These bold statements meet with mixed receptions from the other characters, but the comments never go unnoticed. For instance, when Jo states, "'I don't like favors; they oppress and make me feel like a slave; I'd rather do everything for myself, and be perfectly independent,'" Aunt March is so offended that she refuses to take Jo to Europe with her (Alcott 297). Jo's love for independence causes her to desire a career as a writer, a very public occupation which glorifies the independence of the mind. However, like her comments to Aunt March, Jo's decision to become a woman writer causes her to face social scrutiny.

Jo gains a sense of purpose and independence through her occupation as a writer. However, her society often views authorship as an inappropriate career for a woman because, despite the fact that she physically remains at home while she writes, her ideas gain public exposure. This attempt by women to enter the public sphere was viewed as unacceptable by Victorian standards, but there was one suitable genre for women writers--ladies' books. If the books were written by women and for women about uncontroversial subjects, then the writers' ideas never entered the public, male-dominated world; so, men rationalized, women writers posed no threat to the hierarchy of power and could, therefore, be tolerated. However, Jo does not wish to write sentimental ladies' books; instead, she composes sensational Gothic tales filled with adventures and deaths. The narrator, in an argument similar to Patmore's, states that in the process of researching her stories, Jo gained too much knowledge and, therefore, lost her purity and became less of a woman:

> she was beginning to desecrate some of the womanliest attributes of a woman's character. She was living in bad society; and, imaginary though it was, its

> influence affected her, for she was feeding heart and fancy on dangerous and unsubstantial food, and was fast brushing the innocent bloom from her nature by a premature acquaintance with the darker side of life, which comes soon enough to all of us. (Alcott 349)

This quote, like many of those previously cited in this paper, associates a woman with the "heart and fancy" or the emotional side of human existence and assumes that a woman has an "innocent" original "nature" which can be altered by unclean images. It is also interesting to note that the narrator, unlike Patmore, states that Jo's knowledge of evil things is merely "premature," implying that both women and men are eventually expected to obtain this knowledge; however, Patmore argued that this information should be permanently hidden from the minds of women and was only acceptable knowledge for men. This passage, therefore, seems to suggest a slight relaxation in the gender roles for education of mature women, although most of the other information that Alcott offers regarding the societal views on women writers seems to disagree with this point. Alcott's decision to use a marriage ending and to advocate feminine ideals in which she did not entirely believe, merely because of the societal expectations for the proper content of a girl's instructional book, illustrate the difficulties of women writers overcoming the gender roles for education. But, Jo accepts these difficulties because she knows that her stories not only provide her with a creative outlet to express her independence of mind, but they also provide her with money and, thereby, the ability to be financially independent. The narrator explains Jo's rationale by stating, "She saw that money conferred power; money and power, therefore, she resolved to have . . ." (Alcott 345). Jo has learned how to gain "power" in the public, male-dominated sphere: she must prove that she has economic worth in order to have public, social worth because "to be paid is to be valued" (Spacks 100). Jo cherishes this sense of independence, so she resists

the societal and familial forces which suggest that she should abandon her freedom and submit to the institution of marriage.

The idea of a woman financially supporting herself without the assistance of a man was not widely accepted in Victorian society. Moreover, poor and middle-class girls were encouraged to marry rich men to improve the girls' social status, as well as the status of their parents. If a girl produced a high return in the auction market of marriage by swaying the affections of a rich suitor, her high value also implied the worth of the parenting skills which her mother and father had provided. Aunt March repeatedly expresses this view in her conversations with the March girls; for instance, she tells Meg, "'You ought to marry well, and help your family; it's your duty to make a rich match . . .'" (Alcott 230). However, these views are counteracted by Marmee, whose opinions the March girls always respect and internalize, as she teaches her daughters that a woman should not be required to marry for money, but should instead find someone who makes her happy and whom she loves. Mrs. March also knows that not all women find men to love, so she assures the girls that marriage is not essential in the determination of women's worth or usefulness. She tells her daughters that she would rather they "'be happy old maids than unhappy wives, or unmaidenly girls, running about to find husbands' . . .'" (Alcott 98). This view of spinsterhood as a respectable life choice was discussed in a variety of the ladies' magazines which were immensely popular during Alcott's time period (Welter 169). Like the many other parallels between Alcott's real life and the fictional life which she created for Jo, Alcott advocated an independent lifestyle which could not be achieved within the confines of marriage; she wrote in her journal, "'I'd rather be a free spinster and paddle my own canoe'" (qtd. in Showalter 48-49). Alcott also expressed her opinions on spinsterhood in her other written works such as her article "Happy Women," which was entirely devoted to the subject of unmarried women and which

"consisted of sketches of spinsters like herself who led busy, useful, independent lives" (Strickland 77). Similarly, Jo acknowledges that marriage means a loss of freedom and independence: "'I don't believe I shall ever marry; I'm happy as I am, and I love my liberty too well to be in a hurry to give it up for any mortal man'" (Alcott 365). The reason that women must "give up" their independence upon marriage is that the institution of marriage, even more so than Victorian society at large, advocated a stringent hierarchy of power which was maintained through assigned gender roles.

Marmee seems to defy the idea of assigned gender roles by advocating a marriage filled with "mutual helpfulness," but it is important to note that her concept of mutuality implies that both partners contribute to the marriage, not that their contributions are equal. Even in seemingly egalitarian marriages, such as those which Marmee idealizes, the separation of spheres, where men and women represent the public sphere and the private sphere, respectively, is enforced through gender role expectations. For instance, Marmee, who seems like an independent woman because she single-handedly maintains the March household, is returned to a submissive status as soon as her husband returns home from the war. The narrator stresses this idea and affirms that the March's marriage also conforms to the hierarchy of power: "To outsiders, the five energetic women seemed to rule the house, and so they did in many things; but the quiet man sitting among his books was still the head of the family, the household conscience, anchor and comforter . . ." (Alcott 237). Similar gender expectations impose a hierarchical structure upon the marriages of Mrs. March's daughters. For example, Meg, despite the fact that her marriage is based on "mutual helpfulness," is taught "that a woman's happiest kingdom is home, her highest honor the art of ruling it--not as a queen, but a wise wife and mother" (Alcott 399). In other words, the largest reward she can expect in life is to remain in the assigned, subservient gender roles of wife

and mother and to remain in the domestic sphere of "home," where she will supposedly be "happiest" and will, therefore, have no need to seek entrance into the public sphere. The entire concept of "mutual helpfulness" is proved to be a failure because Meg's marriage, the very Alcott uses to demonstrate the merits of the concept, is shown to merely be the standard patriarchal arrangement. In another example of gender role expectations, Meg fails in her early cooking efforts, so she becomes angry and initiates a fight with John, her husband. Her anger is viewed by John as insubordinate behavior, so he decides to show her that similar outbursts will not be tolerated in the future; in order to accomplish this, he decides "to be calm and kind, but firm, quite firm, and show her where she had failed in her duty to her spouse" (Alcott 278). The "duty to her spouse" mentioned in this quote is, of course, the Angelic virtue of submissiveness. However, as the narrator notes, Meg does not understand her subservient status because she also decided to "show *him* his duty" (Alcott 278). Therefore, in an attempt to improve the mutuality of her marriage, Meg tries to share in John's interest of politics, but her female mind is shown to be too ignorant to understand such complicated ideas:

> Meg tried to look deeply interested, to ask intelligent questions, and keep her thoughts from wandering from the state of the nation to the state of her bonnet. In her secret soul, however, she decided that politics were as bad as mathematics, and that the mission of politicians seemed to be calling each other names; but she kept these feminine ideas to herself . . . (Alcott 398)

The underlying message of this passage is that Meg's mind is more suited for the creation of bonnets than it is for the comprehension of mathematics and politics. Conveying an educational message similar to Patmore's argument, the passage above assumes that Meg cannot understand

these ideas because they are only relevant to those persons who are active in the public sphere, and the ideas are, therefore, not deemed proper knowledge for ladies.

Despite Jo's fervent disapproval of marriage throughout most of the novel, she reverses her opinions after Beth's death. The transfer of Beth's "household spirit" into Jo's body, as previously discussed in this chapter's explanation of the domesticity ideal, causes Jo to view marriage as a "an excellent thing after all" and to succumb to Meg's advice that marriage is "'just what you need to bring out the tender, womanly half of your nature, Jo'" (Alcott 434). This change in Jo's convictions is not a simple transition because, for years, she has openly objected to the ideal of marriage. The narrator explains Jo's reluctance to change her beliefs in women's independence by stating, "She was mortally afraid of being laughed at for surrendering, after her many and vehement declarations of independence" (Alcott 468). Jo's feelings imply that her decision to marry will unavoidably lead to a loss of independence. Many critics and readers have disapproved of Alcott's decision to place Jo into the subordinate roles of wife and mother, but Jo's ultimatum, given in response to Friedrich's marriage proposal, provides the reader with a sense of hope that Jo may maintain her independence within the marriage: "'I'm to carry my share, Friedrich, and help to earn the home. Make up your mind to that, or I'll never go' . . ." (Alcott 480). This statement, like Jo's opinions on the financial independence of women writers, stresses the interdependent relationship between earning money and autonomy within a relationship. The other books in the Little Women series show the reader whether or not Jo did, indeed, achieve her goal of independence and discuss her additional achievements as a mother.

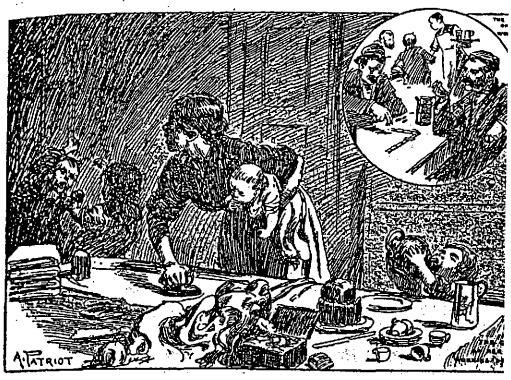
Motherhood, like the other Angelic ideals, placed women in a definite position within the hierarchy of power. Mrs. March describes this position to Meg by telling her that it is a mistake to have "'forgotten your duty to your husband in your love for your children'" (Alcott 391). In

other words, a woman's "duty" to serve her husband supersedes all other activities in her life, even that of raising children, because she occupies a submissive place within the hierarchy. However, when women become mothers, they gain a small amount of power because they are assigned the new and important task of socializing the next generation of adults and of ensuring that the hierarchy will remain intact in the future, thereby "perpetuating the patriarchy" (Foster and Simons 102). Welter describes mothers' duties by stating, "America depended upon her mothers to raise up a whole generation of Christian statesmen who could say 'all that I am I owe to my angel mother.' The mothers must do the inculcating of virtue since the fathers, alas, were too busy chasing the dollar" (171-172). Once again, motherhood is associated with the Angel image, and the idea that women are not allowed to pursue financial independence is stressed. Men are the only people who are allowed to enter the public sphere and to function in the role of their families' economic providers. However, as Figure 1 on the last page of this chapter demonstrates, many husbands' idea of supporting their wives included financial, but not emotional support. These women were expected to raise their children without their husbands' help and to struggle with the fact that they were held accountable by their husbands and by society for any parenting mistakes which later affected their children's lives or developments. Even Mrs. March, who supposedly has a marriage filled with "mutual helpfulness," tells her daughters, "'He [Mr. March] helped and comforted me, and showed me that I must try to practise all the virtues I would have my little girls possess for I was their example'" (Alcott 80). Although Mr. March provides emotional support to his wife, he also expects that she must function as the parent and the moral example for the children. Therefore, women struggle to obtain the Angelic ideals so that they may be perceived as good marriage candidates, but their only reward for these efforts is

to be reassigned to the slightly more important, but still subservient, gender roles of wife and mother.

Alcott's struggle against the Angel in the House ideal within her own life lead her to create the characters of Jo, the rebellious spirit, and Beth, the tragic ideal. Alcott used these characters to provide girls with the patriarchal messages which were expected in girls' instructional books, but she also used characterization and feminist speeches to inspire girls to look past the Angel ideals and to question the ideal's validity within their individual lives. She warned women not to let the Angel ideal form their self-perceptions because the result could only be death; perhaps this death would not be physical, such as Beth's demise, but the ideal would certainly kill their independence and their spirits. Alcott created characters who would continue to touch the lives of girls for generations. Showalter aptly explains the continuing influence of Little Women by stating, "Through all of these Jos of the future, the independent Jo lives and writes, not as the unattainable genius, Shakespeare's American sister, but as a dearly cherished sister of us all" (64). It is this realism in Alcott's work, a feeling which allows girls to see a little piece of themselves within the characters, that has helped to maintain the popularity of the novel and to continue its feminist message that the male-generated ideals are not necessarily the only ideals for women; instead, women may create their own standards by evaluating the characteristics of the Angel idea and rejecting those traits with which they disagree. Although Jo does not attain "genius" as a writer, her character's struggles evoke issues which may be discussed by evaluating the image of Shakespeare's sister which Showalter mentioned, an image which originated in the works of Virginia Woolf, who will be addressed in the following section.

Figure 1



"'Does a Man Support His Wife?' Anonymous cartoon published in 1911 by the Charlton Company as the frontispiece to a pamphlet containing essays by Gilman and British feminist Emmeline Pethick Lawrence. Lampooning popular notions of dependent, nonworking women at home, the tract debated subtleties in the economic relationship between husband and wife." [1]

[1] Rpt. in Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism. By Polly Wynn Allen. Amherst: U of Mass. P, 1988. 21.

Chapter 3

"Professions for Women" and A Room of One's Own: Can Public Life Kill the Angel?

Progress in the women's rights movement flourished between the publication dates of Alcott's Little Women in 1868 and the publication of Virginia Woolf's essays "A Room of One's Own" (1929) and "Professions for Women" (1942). Woolf reviews the events of this historic time period by stating, "there have been at least two colleges for women in existence in England since the year 1866; that after the year 1880 a married woman was allowed by law to possess her own property, and that in 1919 . . . she was given a vote" (Room 1985). However, despite over half a century of progress, women still struggled with the unattainable ideals of the Angel in the House. Woolf, unlike many other authors, such as Alcott, who simply implied their dissatisfaction with the Angel ideal, was so disturbed by the presence of the ideal that she encouraged women to brutally kill it in order to remove it from their lives. In her two essays (cited as Room and "Professions"), Woolf argues that women need to take advantage of their educational opportunities and thereby defy stereotypes which insult women's intellect. In turn, this education will provide women with the confidence to express freely the independence of their minds, kill the Angel, and achieve financial freedom as a reward for their struggle and for their success as female writers.

Woolf stresses the importance of the link between women's lack of education and their subordination. In a powerful scene, she describes her trip to a college library whose entrance was guarded by a man who looked "like a guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings . . . as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction" (Room 1929). The man in this quote is dressed in black and contrasted with the image of typical angel with "white wings," thereby implying an evil-nature. He prevents Woolf from obtaining the heavenly gift of education, which is forbidden to Patmore's angel; therefore, the assigned gender roles

which are usually associated with the Angel are reversed, making the angel educated instead of innocent and ignorant. However, the angel in this passage is male, not female; therefore, men still remain the educated gender. The passage shows the ways in which men control access to education and knowledge; in this example, Woolf may not even enter a place of knowledge without a male escort or a male-written letter which verifies her as a woman who has no desire to become educated.

Woolf focuses on the struggles of women writers, who were confronted with male-generated stereotypes which asserted that an education would have harmful effects upon women's duties and attributes. She explains that many female authors from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries used pen names because they wished to avoid assaults on the status of their chastity. These assaults would be due to the idea that an educated woman must also be a promiscuous woman, an idea which Patmore also expressed in his poem (Room 1952). Woolf describes the different levels of educational opportunity which were provided for men in comparison to women and demonstrates the ways in which these differences determined a person's future success as a writer. To do this, she uses the interesting image of Shakespeare's imaginary sister, Judith. Woolf argues that Judith's parents would have tried to keep her a proper young lady by preventing her from becoming educated and by arranging her marriage. Judith would object, run away, and try to join the theater, but she would be denied because women actresses were not yet taken seriously. Her ultimate fate would be to become an unwed mother and kill herself (Room 1950-1951). This invented tragic story proves an interesting point: Shakespeare would not have been a famous writer if he had been a *female* writer. Therefore, at least in the sixteenth century, the very fact that a person was female would preclude a famous life in the public sphere; the terms "female" and "fame" would have been mutually exclusive. This would also suggest another

reason why women writers used and even still use masculine pen names, names with fewer possibilities for discriminatory assumptions. In a further effort to show how female authors were discriminated against, Woolf composes a poem about the stereotypes they faced:

> Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
>
> Such a presumptuous creature is esteemed,
>
> The fault can by no virtue be redeemed.
>
> They tell us we mistake our sex and way;
>
> Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play,
>
> Are the accomplishments we should desire;
>
> To write, or read, or think, or to enquire,
>
> Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,
>
> And interrupt the conquests of our prime,
>
> Whilst the dull manage of a servile house
>
> Is held by some our utmost art and use. (Room 1957)

This poem describes many of the stereotypes previously discussed in this paper: women's primary duty is to serve the domestic needs of her husband; women should have frivolous pastimes, such as dancing and shopping; and women's acquisition of education and knowledge will diminish their beauty and detract from the time spent at their domestic duties. The passage's sarcastic tone to emphasizes the silliness of these stereotypes, which serve no other purpose than to ensure women's submissive status. However, Woolf believes that mere sarcasm and complaints about the ways in which women are mistreated by men will not change the system. Woolf advises women to rebel against the "masculine opinion to the effect that nothing could be expected of women intellectually"; instead, women should gain confidence in their ideas and feel free to

express the independence of their minds, an assertion very similar to Jo's beliefs in Little Women (Room 1954).

The authors' ability to freely express their thoughts was a measure of their freedom. Any obstacle which hindered the independence of mind to freely express itself would weaken the author's work. Therefore, women writers, whose intellectual independence faced constant restrictions, had to overcome greater obstacles than their male counterparts to produce works of equal quality. The two of the most important obstacles to women's mental freedom was that they had no "room of their own" and that they were haunted by the expectations of the Angel in the House. Woolf explains that the constant noises and interruptions, such as dogs barking and physical health deteriorating, which writers must face lengthen the writing process (Room 1953). This problem may easily be solved because, assuming that most male writers are rich, they may create a writing room in which they are able to remain isolated while writing their masterpieces. However, women have very little funds to build a "room of one's own," so they must overcome the social obstacles of stereotypes as well as the physical obstacles of noise in order to become a writer (Room 1953-1954). Once these obstacles are overcome, a woman must still face her internal obstacles and fight the Angel in the House. Woolf characterizes the Angel: "I discovered that if I were to going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House" ("Professions" 1987). Woolf cannot stand the Angel because it causes her to abandon her independence of mind because of the societal views (men's views) about educated, independent women. The Angel tells Woolf, "'My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you

have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure'" ("Professions" 1988). But, Woolf will not submit to the Angel and return to the submissive status which Patmore advocated, so she kills the Angel. Woolf explains her motivations by stating, "My excuse, if I were had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing" ("Professions" 1988). Woolf would rather commit murder, even if it is imaginary, rather than sacrifice her independence because she knows, just as Jo knew in Little Women, that an occupation as a writer can bring financial independence. For Woolf, this is one of the most important reasons for becoming a writer; it gives one the ability to support oneself without the help of a man. As a model of financial independence, she discusses the literary works of Aphra Behn (ca. 1640-1689) who was "a woman forced by the death of her husband . . . to make her living by her own wits. She had to work on equal terms with men. She made, by working very hard, enough to live on. The importance of this fact outweighs anything that she actually wrote . . ." (Room 1960). In this quote, Woolf shows that she holds a woman's financial independence to be even more important than the quality of the works which produced the profit. Perhaps this idea is an overstatement on Woolf's part, but the history of women's rights in the years after these essays would show that women's increased earning potential did, indeed, play a vital role in improving the independence of women.

Many of the ideas which Woolf expresses in her essays seem to echo those principles of independence which Alcott advocated. By viewing these works side by side, one can see the improvements in women's freedom: Alcott advocated the ideas, but very few women yet had achieved them; in Room, women have gained some of the freedoms which Alcott desired, but Woolf advocates more improvements; by the time that "Professions" is published, Woolf acknowledges that women have gained "rooms of their own" and have many more opportunities

than before. However, Woolf also acknowledges that early twentieth-century society, like nineteenth-century society, expects women to conform to the institutions of domesticity, marriage, and motherhood, as specified within the Angel ideal. Of course, the progression of women's rights is never a simple progression, it involves complexities and setback, but these works show that, in general, women's rights improved over the time spans between these works. So, how would the 1990's fit into this historical progression of women's rights? Has society finally moved beyond the expectations which Patmore described? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is partially "no." The ideal still exists, but in an altered, often more dangerous form, the new Masked Angel, which is discussed in chapter four.

Chapter 4

Modern Ideals:
The New, Masked Angel

The previous chapters have focused on the ways in which the Angel has affected nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women, but are these discussions merely historical curiosities or does the Angel still affect the lives of late twentieth-century women? Many people would say that the Angel was killed long ago by Virginia Woolf and other women like her and that women have made so much progress in their political, social, and economic equality that the submissive stereotypes which are embodied in the Angel would seem obsolete. However, despite women's documented progress throughout the twentieth-century, the America of the 1990s is still a patriarchal society and, as such, there still exist ideals and stereotypes to ensure the subordinate status of women. Therefore, although it is less rigid than in the Victorian age, the hierarchy of power still exists: women are generally forced by many factors, including discrimination, gender differences in educational opportunities, and social stereotypes which dictate what jobs are considered appropriate "woman's work," into lower paying job categories, such as secretaries and elementary school teachers; many women feel the need to "catch" a husband while they are still young and presumably desirable; and society often identifies women only by their roles as a wife and mother. The issue of differences between the sexes is, however, more sensitive than it was in Patmore's day because more women do not accept readily the supposed fact that the hierarchy of power is inevitable; instead, they often blame men for the devices which have been imposed to perpetuate *unnecessary* differences between the conditions for men and women in various fields. Therefore, the Angel ideals, if they are to survive scrutiny, must become subtle; hence, the new, Masked Angel is born. The Masked Angel is both different and similar to Patmore's original Angel, but it still contains ideas about women's proper behaviors within the categories of domesticity, education, chastity, and beauty.

The late twentieth-century definition of domesticity has changed because of the rising economic need for two-income families and the advancements in technology. Most families cannot afford the economic loss which will be incurred if women remain at home all day, tending to the housework, instead of working in the job market. In fact, although society assumes that most women are still housewives, "most women today are in the paid workforce" and, of those, 1/3 are the "sole support of their families" (Kilbourne). This creates an ideal for women which states that they should be a full-time mother/housewife and a full-time worker, but one should note that society does not demand the same roles for men; instead, men are expected to be full-time workers, but are not required to do housework. Ogden states that this difference "is based on the historical distribution of power among those who have money and property. They [men] have always had the right of choice [of whether or not to do housework]. As feminist historians have clearly shown, wives gain prestige when they earn money . . . but men stand to lose the respect of their peers if their income declines" (229). When husbands provide economic and no domestic support, women often feel degraded as though they are trading their domestic services in exchange for their husband's economic support. Paula Cole expresses these sentiments in her popular song "Where Have All the Cowboys Gone":

I will do the laundry,

If you pay all the bills.

Where is my John Wayne?

Where is my prairie sun?

Where is my happy ending?

Where have all the cowboys gone?

She wonders where is the handsome, gallant provider who protects his wife and treats her with respect, a romantic notion often portrayed in popular culture. But, instead of this romantic existence, she is reduced to being her husband's servant because he is the economic provider. In the song's other verses, Cole also offers to "raise the children" and to "wash the dishes" while her husband relaxes, eats food, and ignores her even though she has put on a new dress in an attempt to gain some attention for her efforts. These images are similar to Figure 1 (Ch. 2), which showed a man who "supported" his wife, but forced her to raise the children while he remained at the pub after work. Although many women have successful careers and do not need to depend on the support of their husbands, the differences in gender expectations are detrimental to women's self-esteem because she is *allowed* to work only if it does not conflict with her roles as wife and mother, which, as in the stereotypes of Alcott's and Woolf's times, are still assumed to take precedence. Furthermore, the position of full-time housewife is not viewed as having any economic value, so, despite its role in the perpetuation of culture and life itself, society places low social worth on women who are housewives. Matthews describes this phenomenon by stating that "the home was no longer central" in twentieth-century society, so many women acquired low self-esteems and started "to think of themselves as 'just a housewife'" (xiii). The advancement of technology also aided the devaluation of housewives because their domestic chores theoretically should have taken less time because of the new labor-saving devices, but the validity of this view is questionable at best. This extra time made many people perceive housewives as lazy because their occupations seemed simple, and, as Ogden explains "the task of proving that housework was bona fide employment became more and more difficult" (155). These stereotypes encourage many to join the workforce so that they may gain both economic and social worth.

In order to compete in today's job market, women as well as men need to be well-educated; therefore, the stigmas against educated women, which were so strong in Alcott's and even slightly evident in Woolf's time, have been removed. The innocent, ignorant woman in Patmore's ideal would not be able to help assure the economic stability of her family or even perform domestic tasks, such as using the microwave oven to cook a meal, driving a car to the grocery store, or programming a VCR to record the programs which her husband would miss while he was at work. Therefore, in today's society, educated women are attractive marriage candidates and are usually encouraged to work. These images sharply contrast the ideals which demanded that Jo give up her occupation as a writer in order to pursue marriage and motherhood.

Society still places an extreme importance upon the virtue of chastity, but, unlike in Patmore's time, the emphasis is placed on the lack of chastity, not on the retention of it. The media, including television, magazines, movies, the Internet, and many others, have drawn attention to women's sexuality and used them as sex objects, often providing the message that women should not be respected as fellow human beings. The large amount of unwed teenage mothers in late twentieth-century society shows just one of the harmful affects of this new societal view that women are objects which may be used and then discarded, not unlike the products which the sexy feminine images are often used to sell. If the sexualization of women in the media and the teenage pregnancy rate are viewed in combination, they evoke any interesting pattern: society views a lack of chastity as acceptable, even preferable, when its absence produces results which is desirable to men, such as in the sexy ads; but, when the results are not desirable to men, such as taking responsibility as a teenage father, a lack of chastity is frowned upon. In fact, many teenage mothers face ridicule from society because they were promiscuous, but the fathers, who

no visible signs of fatherhood and often do not remain with the girls whom they impregnate,
e ridicule." In other words, the pregnancy is viewed as the girl's fault.

The focus on sexuality is also closely related to an importance on beauty. Women are
ilized to believe that if they are not beautiful, then they will not attract a husband. This is
aps the most destructive aspect of the Masked Angel because, like many of its other ideals,
sound "harmless," but produce dangerous consequences and feelings of conflict and
quacy. But, as Kilbourne asserts, women can never look like the ideal the media portrays.
explains this by stating, "It's a look based absolutely on cosmetics, airbrushing, camera
. It cannot be achieved! It's inhuman in its flawlessness" (Kilbourne). Like many of the
lards contained in Patmore's Angel, the beauty standards within the Masked Angel cannot
be obtained or, if they are, they can lead to death. Therefore, like Beth who died trying to
the Angelic ideal of domesticity, in the 1990's many women become ill or even die trying to
the ideal of beauty. Women are taught to believe that only thin people are attractive, so
en should strive to achieve thinness, regardless of the costs. Kilbourne lists the statistics
state that "one out of every five college-age women in America has an eating disorder, the
common of which are anorexia and bulimia. Eighty percent of American women think they
verweight. And a national recent survey of fourth-grade girls found that eighty percent of
were on diets." These statistics were from 1987, but they still reflect the current trend of
en committing destructive, deadly behavior in order to attain the "perfect" figure. The idea
women should be thin is instilled in girls at a very young age by one of the most popular toys
merican girls—Barbie. Lord comments that for some people Barbie represents a symbol of
eating problems (230). As an example of the ways in which Barbie promotes anorexic
otypes, Lord describes Barbie's 1965 'Slumber Party' doll which "featured a bathroom scale

permanently set at 110. Mattel also gave her bedtime reading—a book called *How Weight* that offered advice: 'Don't Eat.' Ken, by contrast, was not urged to starve. He came with a sweet roll and a glass of milk" (229-230). It is obvious to see why these could have harmful effects on the impressionable minds of young girls. In 19 decided to change Barbie's bodily measurements, which featured an abnormally small large bust, to more accurately reflect human body proportions. However, Mattel sa changes were merely an attempt to make the doll look more modern, thereby helping girls identify with it; they denied the fact that they changed the doll because of its co effects on young girls' health. However, the ideals of Barbie's beauty and sexuality st popular culture. For instance, the rock group Aqua sings a song entitled "Barbie G states that the singer, like Barbie, is treated like a possession and is merely a beauty ob can brush my hair / Undress me everywhere . . ." These kinds of images, which consider sexuality as a mere toy, promote a patriarchy which is more dangerous than Patmo because the Masked Angel's ideas about sexuality promote the sexual as well as menta women.

It is obvious from history that women have made progress in their fight against ideal. Unfortunately, so far it appears that the Angel cannot be killed. It adapts t environment, puts on a new guise, but its intentions always remain similar. The Ang looms in the thoughts of women, even if it remains unnamed, causing feelings of inadequacy for those women who cannot achieve it. Patmore writes in Angel in the Hou

> Shall Love, where last I leave him, halt?
> Nay; none can fancy or foresee
> To how strange bliss may time exalt

This nursing of civility. (186)

A modern-day reading of this passage, renders a very ironic message. Patmore thought that no one could foretell the changes love would make. Neither could he foretell the impact that the Angel in the House image would have on literary history or the changes that his image would undergo as love's ideals changed. Many writers, including Alcott and Woolf, have found fault with his image; others have praised it. But, throughout the nearly 150 years since the poem's publication the Angel image has shaped the literature and lives of many women, who felt the image's unmistakable presence.

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